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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the work of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) working group. The first section provides background on ISBDs and the revision process. Reasons for the current need for an ISBD working group are summarized in the second section, including the changing concept of what is considered a serial, as well as the appearance of electronic publications and electronic journals. The third section describes the membership of the working group, and issues identified for study are listed in the next section. The fifth section summarizes activities related to ISBD revision that have a direct impact on the work of the group, as well as the following related issues: defining two types of publications (i.e., finite and continuing); recording of the source of title, statement of responsibility, and edition statement from the first versus the latest issue; recording of earliest and latest place of publication/name of publisher information; title changes; and key title/uniform title as a benchmark to determine major changes. The final section notes benefits to libraries and users of the harmonization of serials standards. (MES)

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An update on the ISBD(s) Working Group

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Paper

INTRODUCTION

The IFLA Section on Cataloguing has existed since 1935 and has produced several bibliographic standards and guidelines over the years which have greatly influenced the way libraries all over the world have catalogued their publications.

I believe that the most important achievement of the Section on Cataloguing, through its Standing Committee, has been the development and the almost universal adoption of the various International Standard Bibliographic Descriptions or ISBDs. The impetus for the development of these descriptive standards came out of the International Meeting of Cataloguing Experts held in 1969 in Copenhagen Denmark. In addition to formulating the first concepts related to universal bibliographic control, this international meeting recommended a standard bibliographic description which determined the order of data elements in a bibliographic record and the punctuation to be used.

By 1972 several national bibliographic agencies and national cataloguing codes had adopted the preliminary edition for books of the Standard Bibliographic Description, and over the next few years, several ISBDs for various formats were developed and adopted. While we casually speak about development and adoption over a few years, it is important to point out that many, many meetings, discussions and negotiations were necessary to achieve standardization of descriptive practices after, in some cases, a century of individual, divergent national cataloguing codes.

I refer to the various ISBDs as the children of the Section on Cataloguing. There is now a whole family of ISBDs, and countries either use these ISBDs directly as their cataloguing

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standard, or they incorporate the guidelines for description into their national cataloguing codes.

A systematic process of revision was established in 1978 when the Cataloguing Committee decided that ISBDs should come up for review every five years in order to maintain their currency and relevancy, but also to provide a certain degree of stability for libraries following the ISBD provisions.

It usually takes about ten years to produce a revision. Over the years the Cataloguing Committee has had an almost permanent Working Group to decide on which revisions are necessary. The Group may even recommend that a particular ISBD be abandoned or that a new one should be developed for some new format of material. At the present time we have an ISBD Review Group, chaired by John Byrum of the U.S., which is fulfilling this function.

THE ISBD(S) WORKING GROUP--WHY NOW?

The last revision of the ISBD(S) was completed in 1988. It is therefore time to review this standard and determine whether any changes are required. It was quite obvious that during the past 10 years, the concept of what is considered to be a serial publication has undergone a major change with the appearance of electronic publications and electronic journals. The recently completed revision of ISBD(ER) for electronic resources excluded a consideration of electronic serials, determining that these publications were more properly in the domain of the ISBD(S). The IFLA study on the functional requirements of bibliographic records, published in 1998, will also have an impact on the future development of the ISBDs and will need to be examined in any review of the ISBDs.

The development of the ISBD(S) in 1977 and its revision in 1988 were both rather difficult processes. The initial development of the standard caused much debate and negotiation, not only because the working group was dealing with a notoriously difficult type of material to describe bibliographically, but also because, in the mid 1970's, Unesco was setting up at about the same time the International Serials Data System or ISDS, which developed cataloguing guidelines and a format to describe the same serial publications. The dilemma for the ISBD(S) developers was whether to align themselves with the ISDS initiative or to stay in the family and maintain consistency with the other ISBDs.

While the primary purpose of ISDS is the identification of a serial, most notably through the assignment of a key title and an ISSN number, the primary purpose of ISBD(S) is standardized description of the title in hand. While it must have been a very difficult decision to make, in the end, the ISBD(S) stayed with the descriptive patterns developed for all the ISBDs. In hindsight, we can say that here was a missed opportunity to work cooperatively and develop one bibliographic descriptive standard for serial publications.

Twenty five years later, the opportunity to harmonize the major bibliographic standards for describing serial publications is again feasible, and it is very exciting to contemplate that we just may succeed this time. The objective of harmonization is, as you will see from my presentation and from several of the others this afternoon, very real and is driving not only the content of the various standards but also the revision timeframe and schedule.

THE ISBD(S) WORKING GROUP

The ISBD(S) Working Group was therefore established by the IFLA Section on Cataloguing in 1998 to revise the existing standard, but perhaps more importantly it was given the mandate to work cooperatively with the revisers of the other major serials standards, namely ISSN and AACR.

The Working Group is structured along three levels, in order to allow for widespread input

from serials experts and interested parties the world over. The actual Working Group itself is composed of 10 members from 8 countries. Most of the members are also currently serving on the IFLA Cataloguing Committee.

In addition there are a group of experts called Resource Persons that provide valuable input to the deliberations of the Group and attend meetings wherever possible.

The third layer consists of Corresponding Members, those people who wish to keep informed about developments and can submit comments as appropriate. We have tried to limit the number of corresponding members to cover areas of the world that are not represented in a more formal way on the Group itself.

Although three meetings of the Working Group have been held to date, work is ongoing and the review is continuing electronically through a listserv to which all the members belong. Between meetings, discussions take place on this listserv and advance the work of the group.

ISSUES FOR REVIEW

The Working Group began its consideration of the existing standard by requesting papers from its members on various issues to be resolved or decided upon as part of the review. The topics identified for further study were:

- Scope of ISBD(S)
- Definition of a serial.
- Sources for description.
- Changes requiring new records.
- Multiple format issues.
- Relationship of title practice between ISBD(S) and ISSN.
- Transcription versus Identification.
- Key title as benchmark.

At the November 1998 meeting of the ISBD(S) Working Group, the recommendations put forward by members in their papers were reviewed. While it was decided that several areas required further discussion, the following decisions were made at the meeting:

- expand the scope of ISBD(S) to cover integrating.
- expand the definition of "serial" in such a way as to incorporate integrating publications
- provide separate records and ISSNs for multiple formats
- inclusion of area 3 when first issue is not available as a basis of description

It was also decided that a small subgroup of the Working Group be given the task of reviewing the two papers that had been written on the proposal to use the key title as a benchmark.

WHERE DOES THE WORK OF THE ISBD(S) WORKING GROUP STAND TODAY?

Since the November meeting, there have been a number of activities related to the ISBD(S) revision that have a direct impact on its work:

- The ISSN community has asked for some time for a revision of the ISSN manual, which guides the description and identification of serial publications, since the manual dates from 1983. In addition new guidelines for how to describe electronic publications need to be added. An ISSN Manual Revision Working Group was created and met for the first time in June 1999. The members of the Working Group, I think, are also working towards harmonization and close contacts are being made with the work of ISBD(S).

- In April 1999, Jean Hirons' report, commissioned by the Joint Steering Committee for the Revision of AACR, was forwarded to the ISBD(S) Review Group at the same time as it was released to the AACR and ISSN communities. In the interests of harmonization, it is critical that all three communities work together to align their rules as far as possible. This report presents an excellent basis for providing the necessary focus on the key issues which require resolution. Although the report was prepared primarily in the interests of progressing the revision of AACR to reflect seriality issues, it also acknowledges the importance of harmonization with ISBD(S) and ISSN and, therefore, includes a statement of impact of each proposal on ISBD(S) and ISSN. I should also point out that the recommendations in the report are only that, recommendations, and have not yet been reviewed nor approved by the JSC of AACR.

I would like to highlight the major issues from the report which may affect the current thinking with regard to areas already decided on as well as those areas pending decision by the ISBD(S) Working Group.

Define two types of publication: 1) Finite 2) Continuing

The ISBD(S) Working Group supports expanding the scope of ISBD(S) to cover all continuing (i.e. including integrating) resources. Its approach has been to draft a revised definition of "serial" to encompass all types of continuing resources. The AACR proposal is to define "integrating resource" separately; although there is a revised definition for "serial" in the AACR paper, the intent of the revision is not to incorporate integrating resources within the definition of serial. Further discussion to reconcile definitions is required.

Source of title/statement of responsibility and edition statement: which issue/iteration?

Should the title and statement of responsibility and edition statement be recorded from the first or earliest available issue or from the latest? AACR and ISBD(S) currently specify to use the first or earliest available issue (although ISBD(S) provides for using either the first, the last or an intermediate issue). Although it is clear that there is little choice but to describe integrating resources from the latest issue, what about successively-issued resources?

The report to JSC recommends that all continuing resources should be based on the latest issue; the ISBD(S) Working Group has yet to decide. This is an important area for alignment given that the title/statement of responsibility area is critical for identification. The advantages and disadvantages of one approach over the other require careful consideration.

Recording of earliest and latest place of publication/name of publisher information

The recommendation for AACR is to record both the earliest and latest place of publication/name of publisher in those cases when this information changes within the life of the continuing resource. Although this possible change was discussed by the ISBD(S) Working Group, the members were split on whether earliest, latest or successive publication information should be recorded. The Group also raised the issue of how dates of publication would be recorded whichever way the decision went.

Title changes

One of the most important and challenging areas that is being addressed by AACR, ISBD(S) and ISSN is consideration of what constitutes major and minor title changes. Agreement on rules for title changes that subsequently determine when to create a new record and a new key title (major title change) and when not create a new record or key title (minor title change) is critical to record sharing and compatibility across systems.

Adopting the major/minor terminology of ISBD(S) and ISSN, the report to JSC proposes six conditions that would constitute a minor title change. Although AACR, ISBD(S), and ISSN

communities share the desire to minimize the number of title changes, each community will need to consider implications of the proposed conditions. Can all communities agree that the "addition, deletion or change in words occurring after the first three words that does not indicate a change in subject matter" is a minor change? Another issue to be considered is how well the criteria work for titles in different languages. For example, the report recommends that the "addition or deletion of words at the end of the title denoting type of publication for periodicals" would be a minor title change. Since, in French language titles, words denoting type of publication often precede the title, would this condition still be considered a minor title change? What is the situation for titles in other languages?

Of all the areas under review, the alignment of title change rules by AACR, ISBD(S) and ISSN communities is, perhaps, the most important. Harmonization of this area would be a significant and important achievement, resulting in many benefits for international cooperation, record exchange, and of course, cost savings.

Key title/Uniform title as benchmark to determine major changes

The idea of having a single approach to the unique identification of serial titles was proposed as a means of eliminating the confusion and overlap caused by the existence of both the key title and uniform title in one record and as a way of providing a benchmark for determining title changes. It has been proposed that the key title and uniform title concepts be combined to serve as the benchmark. As noted above, the ISBD(S) established a subgroup to consider the implications of the benchmark proposal. The subgroup looked at differences between the uniform title and key title and concluded that further consideration of this proposal be deferred by the ISBD(S) Working Group until after the AACR and ISSN communities have assessed the implications of the proposal. Since ISBD(S) is concerned with description and not access points, it was felt that ISBD(S) revision could continue without a decision on this issue.

While the benchmark proposal has many merits, it also has many implications that require careful consideration. The differences between the uniform title and key title qualifiers are not insignificant and alignment will require compromise. Qualifiers are often names of corporate bodies, which raises the issue of different rules for establishing the authorities for corporate names. Because of the complexity of the issue, it is included in the AACR report not as a recommendation but for "future consideration".

CONCLUSION

As you can see there are many contentious issues involved in this revision to the standard, and it will take serious analysis and negotiating to come to a consensus. I should mention that the last revision of the ISBD(S) took over 6 years to complete. In contrast, we hope to have a revision ready for publication in the fall of the year 2000.

I think it is important to conclude by emphasizing the benefits of harmonizing the serials standards. If we lose sight of those benefits, the temptation may be to abandon our effort to work towards one serials standard, and we will have separate standards that are complicated to administer and confusing to understand by our users.

BENEFITS

Harmonization of serials standards will bring many benefits to libraries and users:

1. Increased opportunities for national and international record sharing which, in turn, reduces the cost of cataloguing (i.e. costs of original vs. derived cataloguing).

2. There is increased potential for international cooperative activities and projects (for example, creation of union lists).

3. There could be shared responsibility for ongoing maintenance of standards for serials and possibilities for joint problem-solving.

4. Although the Internet has made world-wide access to library catalogues possible, having one set of rules to describe serial publications in those catalogues would eliminate confusion for users, and cataloguers, trying to identify and locate material.

5. And finally, NBAs could use one record for their national library catalogues and the same record for reporting to the international ISSN register. Currently, some national bibliographic agencies create two records (one for their national library catalogue and the other for the ISSN register); others report to the ISSN register using records created for their national library catalogues thereby, in some cases, violating some of the provisions in the ISSN rules for cataloguing.

There are some very real and tangible benefits to harmonization for library users, cataloguers and library administrators.

WHAT NEXT

The revision process continues in all three serials camps. But good contacts among the three are being maintained. Smaller differences in the three standards are being addressed and resolved. However there remain several of those larger issues I mentioned earlier that will need all our skill to resolve.

In order to address some of these larger issues face-to-face, we are planning to hold a three-way meeting in the next six months at a location still to be determined. I am pleased to say that the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science has given us a funding grant to hold this meeting. I am expecting some major results over the next year. I think we will all benefit from this endeavour to harmonize serials standards.

Latest Revision: *August 11, 1999*

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